1999-2000 17th season

esprit orchestra



A Harry Somers Celebration

Massey Hall Sunday, November 14, 1999

esprit orchestra

Sunday, November 14th, 1999 Massey Hall

Opening Concert of the Massey Hall New Music Festival

programme

Celebrating Harry Somers (1925-1999)

Featured soloists

James Parker, piano Jean Stilwell, mezzo-soprano

Pre-Concert Video Collage Pre-Concert Audio Collage **Peggy Liptrott** Charles Gray

The Third Piano Concerto

Harry Somers

(Canada)

Five Songs for Dark Voice

Harry Somers (Canada)

Intermission

Commentary & Reading

Barabara Chilcott Somers

(Canada)

Elegy, Transformation, Jubilation

Harry Somers (Canada)

The Third Piano Concerto (1996)

Dedicated to the memory of E. Robert Schmitz

Approximate duration: 30 minutes

"I studied piano with Robert Schmitz during the late 1940s. He was one of the major influences of my life. His ideas and concepts, his calm dedication to music and study, made a lasting impression on me. Robert Schmitz' contributions to music in general, and the piano in particular, were considerable.

notes

A graduate of the Paris Concervatoire, Schmitz knew Claude Debussy and performed much of Debussy's music under the composer's guidance. He was one of the first to bring the music of Charles Ives to the attention of the musical world. He was responsible for bringing Maurice Ravel to North America in the 1920s for a memorable tour of Canada and the United States. He introduced the music of Olivier Messiaen to New York in the 1930s.

As a pianist he was held in the highest esteem by Virgil Thompson when the later was music critic for the New York Herald Tribune. He wrote a revolutionary book on piano technique and the musical process titled *The Capture of Inspiration*.

The main ideas for the 3rd Piano Concerto have been on my mind for more than ten years. I first started writing them down four years ago in a couple of movements of my *11 Miniatures* for oboe and piano, a composition commissioned by Lawrence Cherney. With Alex Pauk's invitation to write a work for Esprit, I decided to give those pieces full play.

The 3rd Piano Concerto is in three movements. The first is based entirely on the three note motif presented by piano at the opening. The second begins with an extensive, quiet piano solo, and then develops into what is essentially a three part form. The third movement consists of a play of polytonality, patterns, motifs and their variations. The harp is introduced for the first time."

~ Harry Somers

The Third Piano Concerto was commissioned by Esprit Orchestra in 1996 and premiered by Esprit under the direction of Alex Pauk, with James Parker as soloist.

Five Songs for Dark Voice (1956)

Text by Michael Fram

Approximate duration: 13 minutes

Initially planned as a cycle of separate songs, the composition took shape eventually as a cantata or concert aria with several different interrelated sections. The original title, *Five Songs for Dark Voice*, has however been retained because the composer "rather liked it." Set to poems by the Toronto poet Michael Fram, the songs concern the inability of the human spirit to dwell within the confines of the "brick and steel" of the "impersonal" city.

An orchestral introduction, which establishes the mood as well as the tonal centre of E-flat, provides motives for later development on a give-and-take basis with the soloist. The slow opening stanza gives way to an ironic *Allegro* at the

slogan-like words "Be perfect and articulate." The explosiveness of the short motives in this section is a trademark of Somers' early style. The remaining sections are a recitative of passionate colouring expressed in bold, wide intervals: a *Lento* recalling the opening phrases; a fantasia-like passage depicting "brick and steel" and others of the poem's more concrete references; and finally, a slow, eloquently long-lined *coda*.

Michael Fram, the author of the poem, is a Toronto lawyer and writer. His several works with Somers—concluding *Three Simple Songs*, a prelude and fugue for unaccompanied chorus called *Where Do We Stand, O Lord?*, and the oneact chamber opera *The Fool*—are true collaborations in the sense that words and music have been worked out jointly and with mutual accommodation. For example, in the *Five Songs*, many quite free repetitions, interleavings, exchanges and recollections of lines of text occur (their motivation being musical rather than literary).

The Five Songs for Dark Voice belong to a phase in Somers' writing of the 1950s marked by a rather austere and classically-derived linear style, and by a daring juxtaposition of key-centred passages with atonal ones. The musical materials of the cycle are almost all scale-like in their basis, and range from the simple diatonic steps of E-flat minor through chromatic and whole-tone scale patterns to various free combinations of these, and back again.

Several of Somers' following works continued, and notably extended, his long series of contributions to vocal music: *Twelve Miniatures* (1965), on Japanese *haiku* texts; *Evocations* (1966), to Somers' own libretto; and of course *Louis Riel*, his spectacular full-length opera, written with Mavor Moore and Jacques Languirand and produced by the Canadian Opera Company.

(adapted from the TSO News, February 1969)

Five Songs for Dark Voice was commissioned by Stratford Festival in 1956

1

Now every grief is personal. How can I walk in this city? Too many sightless eyes, Too many hopeless hands, Too many avenues of pity: Too many and too many.

п

Be perfect and articulate, Look neither to the right nor left, Know everything, be temperate, Look neither to the left nor right, Do not go walking late at night, Do not be passionate.

Ш

The hands that do not touch will bruise, The sight of sightless eyes will press Hot etching tears, corrode ravines, And from above your up-turned face Marked in the avenues of pity Be seen nerve-centre of your city.

IV

How can I talk of this city?
(Now every grief is personal.)
I say it is built by the water's edge;
In the bay are three islands.
With the thrust of brick and steel
The human face and all things human,
The living, fiving dead, and dying,
So many and so many.
At four o'clock before the dawn,
In the echoing street there is yourself.

١

How can I hold within me all that is?
Some shape, some subtle touch will break me,
Some joy explode me in a rain of stars
To fall in ashes on this city.
Now every grief is personal.
Do not deny me; grant at last
Encompassing compassion,
To hold within me all that is,
To care past loving and past hate—
That I may walk in your city.

Elegy, Transformation, Jubilation (1981)

Approximate duration: 16 minutes

"Some of you may remember that some time ago I extended an invitation to you to enter the 20th Century before you left it. By way of communicating composers' problems I quoted Arnold Schönberg saying 'my music isn't modern; it's just badly played.' When a classic is performed and you don't like it, you blame the conductor; when a new work is performed and you don't like it, you blame the composer. New music usually gets the short end of rehearsal time. Of course there are happy exceptions, as you will witness, but these are indeed exceptions, not the rule."

Esprit Orchestra's performance of this piece tonight is the first in which the composer's instructions have been followed with respect to placement of musicians and attention to detail in the complex multi-tempo, multi-layered and multi-phonic organization of the *Jubilation* movement. In effect, this is the work's true world premiere.

The *Elegy* can be performed as a separate piece on its own. In terms of orchestral forces, the trilogy has been conceived as evolving from homophonic to multiphonic; from one group to five. The orchestra for the *Elegy* and *Transformation* movements exists as a single, homogeneous group. During the *Transformation*, however, certain instruments move to new positions.

For the *Jubilation*, the orchestra is split-up into five groups, spaced apart and on risers to create the greatest possible acoustic separation. This spatial division is essential to the multi-phonic concept of the movement, which demands the greatest clarity and distinction of each group from the other. The *Jubilation* evolves to five separate tempi played simultaneously, each of the groups having its own tempo and characteristic materials.

For the work's premiere, Godfrey Ridout wrote: "Elegy is in memory of various friends who have passed away. It is written for the strings, with the woodwinds affecting the colour at a few points. The general dynamic level is very low, with the exception of one build to intensity. An extended melodic line with simple chordal accompaniment makes up the musical materials.

The conclusion of *Elegy* becomes the beginning of *Transformation*. Here, the musical materials are reduced to the most basic acoustical phenomenon—the fundamental vibrating sound and its overtones. Orchestral colours keep changing and shifting, at first very quietly, then, over a period of time, becoming more and more intense. The first presentation of a strong, clearly defined rhythmic motive by four French horns in unison serves to introduce elements which will develop onto the *Jubilation*, where horns, trumpets, piano, winds and percussion do a major part of the celebrating. In *Jubilation*, the orchestra is split up into five different groups. The compositional technique is rather like that used for films and recording where many different tracks of music are recorded separately, in different colour and tempi, and then combined."

Elegy, Transformation, Jubilation was commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 1980 through a grant from the Canada Council

Harry Somers

Harry Somers was born in Toronto on September 11th, 1925. Spending part of his summer vacation at a friend's country place, he had an opportunity to listen to the music of Beethoven, Brahms and Mozart played on an old piano by Dr. Max Brödel, a leader of medical art in America at that time, and his wife, both skilled amateur musicians. The same year, back in Toronto, he began taking piano lessons with Dorothy Hornfelt and after two years of studying with her was able to pass the Grade 8 examination of the Royal Conservatory of Toronto. At the same time, he began composing, producing his first String Quartet when he was only seventeen. Recalling his first efforts in composition, Somers said:

From the beginning I had been writing my own music. These early works went through various styles, but with a difference. They were not imitative because I had no knowledge of much music other than a few classics. I was fortunate in learning to speak for myself at the beginning.

In 1942, Somers began studying piano with Reginald Godden and theory and composition with John Weinzweig, with whom he worked through the 1940s. Moving to San Francisco in 1948, he studied piano with E. Robert Schmitz, a distinguished French performer, pedagogue and the dedicatee of Somers' Third Piano Concerto. Somers' talent was recognized in 1949 by a \$2,000 Canadian Amateur Hockey Association scholarship for the study of composition abroad, and he went to Paris for a year to become a pupil of the renowned composer, Darius Milhaud. During this sojourn, Somers completed four large compositions and began to work on his Symphony No. 1.

"It was a chance to study and write, and I needed every minute," said Somers, "Milhaud forced me to rethink and confirm my ideas, and this was good." Back in Toronto in the autumn of 1950, he continued working on his Symphony, which was completed the following year. In spite of his creative achievements, however, Somers' financial means were exhausted. To make a living he first got a job as a taxi-driver, and then, following an accident, drifted into music-copying. He managed finally to adjust his job requirements in such a way that he only worked part-time, using almost all of his time for composing.

Through 1960-61, Somers returned to France (by means of a Canada Council Senior Arts Fellowship) to become conversant with the latest developments in contemporary music in Paris and to study Gregorian chant. During the 1960s he also became active in broadcasting and introducing Canadian music into schools. A grant from the Canadian Cultural Institute in Rome allowed Somers to live there from 1969-1971. Late in 1971, he returned to Canada via the Far East where he was deeply moved by various aspects of Eastern music and philosophy, much of which he had been exposed to as a youth by his mother, a theosophist and a student of comparative religion.

Somers' music has been performed in the USA, Central and South America, Europe, the former Soviet Union and throughout Canada. He produced major scores for stage, concert hall, film, radio and television and employed voices, instruments and synthetic sounds in a wide variety of forms, both traditional and new. In the *Catalogue of Canadian Composers*, Brian Cherney wrote: "Although in the course of his career Somers has absorbed many influences (eg, Weinzweig, Bartók, baroque counterpoint, 12-tone procedures and Gregorian chant), his music has retained certain trademarks, independent of trends such as the serialism of the 1950s."

Somers was honoured variously, receiving the Critics' Award of the Cava dei Tirreni Summer Festival, Italy in 1965; the Italian Government Award and the William Harold Moon Award in 1976. He was made a Companion of the Order of Canada in 1972. On the occasion of the awarding of his honourary degree from the University of Toronto, John Beckwith said:

"[Somers'] music has been created...out of a mastery of the technical processes of his time, out of a wide intellectual curiosity, out of a sense of his relation to tradition; at a more essential level it has been created out of pain and isolation and (like all good music) out of love—in other words altogether out of an extraordinary feeling for the human condition....Through it all runs a remarkable elemental quality which...identifies the Somers style like a thumb-print....The music has spoken to us—and through us to the rest of the world—with an eloquence and force that few segments of our musical repertoire have matched."

Harry Somers passed away late in the evening of March 9th of this year, following a long battle with cancer.

James Parker piano

James Parker has revealed his arresting technical prowess and subtle pianistic artistry to critical celebration in solo, chamber and orchestral concerts across Europe, the United States and Canada.

He has performed with every major Canadian orchestra—including the Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg and National Arts Centre orchestras, to name a few. Mr. Parker has also given recitals throughout North America and Command Performances for dignitaries and diplomats at the Canada House in London, the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D. C. and the Canadian Consulate in Chicago. A frequent guest on both radio and television, he has performed on Bravo!, the CanWest Global Network, MuchMusic, and remains a mainstay on both local and national CBC radio broadcasts.

Mr. Parker first achieved coast-to-cost prominence after winning first place at the 1984 Eckhardt-Gramatte National Music Competition. The Canadian recital tour that followed this brilliant victory established him in the vanguard of the nation's most electrifying and dynamic musicians. Harry Somers wrote his Third Piano Concerto specifically for Mr. Parker, and it was he who gave the work its world premiere.

Jean Stilwell mezzo-soprano

Jean Stilwell has sung with all the major orchestras and opera companies in Canada and with many others throughout the world. Her concerts have included the Canadian premiere of Sir Michael Tippet's *The Mask of Time* with the TSO, Mahler's 2nd Symphony and Brahms' Alto Rhapsody with the Edmonton SO, Mahler's 8th Symphony with the Vancouver SO, *Israel In Egypt* with the

Winnipeg SO, Berio's *Folk Songs* with the Calgary Philharmonic and the National Ballet, Beethoven's 9th Symphony with l'Orchestre Symphonique du Quebec and the TSO, Morawetz's *From the Diary of Anne Frank* with both Symphony Nova Scotia and the WSO, Schafer's *Adieu Robert Schumann* with the NAC Orchestra, and Mahler's 2nd Symphony at the TAKEFU International festival in Japan.

Ms. Stilwell made her Toronto debut on the stage of the St. Lawrence Centre and her European recital debut in England's Wigmore Hall. Her United States concert debut was at the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York City with Trevor Pinnock conducting Vivaldi's *Gloria*. Other U.S. appearances include performances of *Messiah* with the St. Louis Symphony, conducted by Trevor Pinnock, and a reprise of *The Mask of Time* with the Pittsburgh SO, conducted by Andrew Davis.

Ms. Stilwell made her European opera debut as Dorabella in Mozart's *Cosi Fan Tutte* with the Welsh National Opera, returning to sing the title role of *Carmen* which led to performances of that role with the COC and Manitoba Opera. Ms. Stilwell made her American opera debut as Carmen with Pittsburgh Opera and repeated the role, to great critical acclaim, with the New York city opera. For Minnesota Opera, Ms. Stilwell has appeared as Maddelena in *Rigoletto* and starred last season as Penelope in a new production of *Il Ritorno Di Ulisse In Patria* at Britain's Buxton Festival, a role she repeated for Opera North in their 1996-97 season.

Recent highlights include *Messiah*; Beethoven's 9th Symphony; Honeger's *King David* with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir; Cheribino in *Le Nozze Di Figaro* for Opera Lyra, Ottawa, conducted by Mario Bernardi; Musetta in *La Boheme* for Calgary Opera; Tippet's *A Child of Our Time* with the Vancouver SO; as well as returns to the COC (Maddelena in *Rigoletto*, Duchess Federica in *Lusa Miller*); and the Takefu International Festival (Mozart's *Requiem* and as a artist in residence).

Alex Pauk conductor

As a conductor and composer, Alex Pauk has been a leading exponent of new music in Canada since his graduation from the University of Toronto in 1971. After graduation, he participated in the Ontario Arts Council Conductor's Workshop for two years before continuing his studies in Europe and Japan.

In the early 1970s, Pauk settled in Vancouver where he was named Vancouver's Musician of the Year in 1975. While there, he helped establish the new music group *Days Months and Years to Come*, for which he was the Music Director and Conductor until 1979. Before moving to Vancouver, he had been instrumental in establishing *ArrayMusic* in Toronto and was its first conductor.

Pauk returned to Toronto again in 1980, founding the Esprit Orchestra three years later. Along with his careful attention to programming, Pauk's work involves a strong role in the development of Esprit's *Toward a Living Art* education and outreach programme.

Pauk was Co-chair for the 1984 ISCM World Music Days held in Toronto and Montreal. In 1986, he was the Music Director and Conductor of the Satori Festival of New Music in Winnipeg, and most recently he was Music Director for R. Murray Schafer's *Princess of the Stars*, performed at Wildcat Lake in the Haliburton Forest and Wildlife Reserve.

As a composer, Pauk has written over thirty-five works and received commissions from the CBC, New Music Concerts, Vancouver New Music Society, Quebec Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, leading Indian dancer and choreographer Menaka Thakkar, harpist Erica Goodman, the Hannaford Street Silver Band and many others.

He has also composed for film, television, radio and music theatre. Pauk's most recent film scores, co-written with Alexina Louie, include the soundtracks for director Don McKellar's film *Last Night* and Jeremy Podeswa's *The Five Senses*.

Esprit Orchestra

Canada's only orchestra devoted exclusively to new orchestral music, Esprit Orchestra was founded in 1983 by Music Director & Conductor Alex Pauk through the generous financial assistance of The Canada Council for the Arts and Suncor Inc.

Comprised of a core of forty-five dedicated musicians with the special skills needed to perform contemporary orchestral music, Esprit presents its annual subscription series of concerts in Toronto. The orchestra is devoted to developing a Canadian musical literature. To this end, it commissions and premieres new works each season, ensures the continued public access to these works through encore performances, radio broadcasts, compact disc and film recordings, and national and international tours. Esprit's concerts are regularly recorded and broadcast on CBC Radio One and Radio Two.

Only in its 17th season, Esprit has already commissioned 55 new works from 44 different composers, including such internationally-acclaimed Canadians as José Evangelista, John Rea, R. Murray Schafer and Harry Somers. Moreover, works commissioned by NEXUS, CBC Radio, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (among others) have been premiered by Esprit.

Another facet of Esprit's mission is a commitment to setting new Canadian music within an international context. The orchestra has introduced Canadian audiences to major works by such contemporary masters as Takemitsu, Ligeti, Berio, Adams, Schnittke and Penderecki.

Maestro Pauk and the orchestra have also collaborated with leading soloists and ensembles including Jean Stilwell, Maureen Forrester, Rivka Golani, Desmond Hoebig, Richard Margison, Jon Kimura Parker, André Laplante, Robert Aitken and NEXUS.

In September of 1999, Esprit completed its triumphant debut European tour. With four concerts in Amsterdam at the invitation of the International Gaudeamus Music Week and another in Paris, the tour represented one of the largest-

ever presentations of Canadian orchestral music in Europe. Over 90% of the repertoire was Canadian and compatriots Robert Aitken and Erica Goodman were the orchestra's chosen soloists. The previous year, Esprit also toured Western Canada, presenting concerts and educational activities to rave reviews.

The Esprit Orchestra's excellence and commitment to the future of our culture has not gone unnoticed: In 1990, SOCAN's Award of Merit, recognizing imaginative programming of contemporary music over several seasons was presented to the orchestra; in 1995, Esprit was awarded the Jean A. Chalmers National Music Award for outstanding contribution to musical creativity; the orchestra was awarded its first Lieutenant Governor's Award for the Arts for success in developing private sector and community support in 1996, its second in 1998; and, the same year, Esprit was one of twenty-three recipients of a special "million-dollar birthday gift" celebrating Joan Chalmers' seventieth birthday.

The orchestra expanded its activities in 1988 to include an education and audience development programme, *Toward a Living Art*, that has involved hundreds of students in workshops, rehearsals and concerts with Maestro Pauk, orchestra musicians, leading soloists and composers, and other professionals from the music industry.

November 1996 saw Esprit's *Toward a Living Art Festival*—a week-long open-house where students and the general public could meet composers from around Canada—feature open rehearsals, workshops, artists' talks, film screenings and concerts. The next year, Esprit initiated its *Student Audience Programme*, and provided 500 high school students with free tickets to concerts.

The orchestra has also appeared in several Rhombus Media films, among them Ravel; September Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill; The Eternal Earth, about Canadian composer Alexina Louie; Last Night, the award-winning film by Don McKellar; and most recently Jeremy Podeswa's The Five Senses.

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Dear Friends of Harry Somers:

This evening's presentation by the Esprit Orchestra of Harry Somers' compositions is a potent reminder that compositions of Harry, who died in March of this year, are not to be found in CD format. To remedy this situation and make Harry's music available to the wider public, a few of us, under the guidance of Robert Cram, Professor of Music at the University of Ottawa, are raising money to assist others in producing and recording as many of his pieces as possible.

Imagine being able to leave a live performance of Somers' music and go home, knowing that you could hear it all over again on CD.

Those of you who think of Harry, and think of his place in the world of contemporary music may like to contribute to this very Canadian cultural project. Cheques, for which income tax receipts will be available under Revenue Canada number 0983439-22, should be made out to: Pierrot Concerts (Somers Recording Project), 6-10 Clarence Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5P3.

Thank you,

Barbara Chilcott Somers Dalton Robertson Robert Cram

ESPRIT ORCHESTRA

Alex Pauk music director & conductor

Violin I

Fujiko Imajishi, concertmaster

Jayne Maddison

Anne Armstrong
Paul Zevenhuizen

Mia King

Parmela Attariwala

Violin II

Dominique Laplante

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Angela Rudden

Cello

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Maurizio Baccante

Roman Borys

Bass

Thomas Hazlitt

Robert Speer

Flute

Douglas Stewart

Christine Little

Maria Pelletier

Piccolo

Shelley Brown

Oboe

Lesley Young

Melvin Berman

Peter Voisey

English Horn

Karen Rotenberg

Clarinet

Max Christie

Ameene Shishakly

Greg James

Bass Clarinet

Richard Thomson

Bassoon

Gerald Robinson

William Cannaway

Elizabeth Gowen

Contra Bassoon

Stephen Mosher

French Horn

Gary Pattison

Miles Hearn

Vincent Barbee

Deborah Stroh

Diane Doig

Brenda Cook

Trumpet

James Gardiner

Raymond Tizzard

Norman Engel

Valerie Cowie

Trombone

Robert Ferguson

David Archer

Herbert Poole

Tuba

Scott Irvine

Percussion

Blair Mackay

Trevor Tureski

Ryan Scott

Mark Duggan

Piano

Lydia Wong

Harp

Janice Lindskoog

Personnel Manager

Gerald Robinson

This was the final dictation Harry made to his wife Barbara on Monday morning, March 8th, the day before he died:

"There's no limit in this friggin' country if it drops its colonial mentality. Don't worry about being so god-damned small, big or anything—just realize your potential. Just be—Anything—The rest of the world will do what it will do—I just love it all—just read John Ralston Saul! We've got marvelous talent in every field—so stop bitching and get on with it!"

~ Harry Somers

Esprit Orchestra would like to thank the following individuals and businesses for their support of its 1999-2000 Season. For more information on how you or your organization can contribute to the continued success of Canada's only orchestra devoted to developing a Canadian musical literature, please call (416) 815-7887.

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Don't Miss Esprit's Next Concert

The Palace of the Cinnabar Phoenix

Friday, March 24th, 2000 8:00pm (7:00pm pre-concert talk)

Guest Artists

Ryan Scott, marimba Choir (tba)

Composers

R. Murry Schafer (Canada)

The Palace of the Cinnabar Phoenix, 2000 world premiere

(for choir and orchestra—excerpts from Patria 8 - a music theatre work in progress)

Maki Ishii (Japan)

Concertante, Op. 79, 1988 Canadian premiere (for marimba solo and six percussionists)

José Evangelista (Canada) *Alap & Gat*, 1998

Claude Vivier (Canada) Pulau dewata, 1977

Esprit's first concert of the New Year includes a preview of their massive Millennium project commission of R. Murray Schafer: the penultimate work in his *Patria* series – *The Palace of the Cinnabar Phoenix* – a spectacular music drama set in ancient China's T'sang Dynasty. Intended to be performed on, in and around the edge of a Canadian lake as night descends, the work is a message of peace which speaks of harmony between East, West and nature. The March 24th programme will present segments of the work for choir and orchestra in a concert version. Evangelista's *Alp & Gat* derives its inspiration from North Indian musical forms, while Ishii's *Concertante* reveals the composer's heritage through the vigor and mastery of his highly individualistic style. Claude Vivier's magical *Pulau dewata* (for any combination of instruments) was influenced by the composer's extensive travels in Asia and has become his best known and most widely-performed piece.

Call to order tickets at (416) 366-7723

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